

The idea of the detective

# Agenda

- Historical context for the emergence of the modern “detective” role
- How that role was framed and defined
- Distinguishing conventions
- In real life and fiction

# A new word

- 1843 *Chambers's Jrnl.* **12** 54 Intelligent men have been recently selected to form a body called the 'detective police' · · at times the detective policeman attires himself in the dress of ordinary individuals.
- 1850 W. H. Wills *Mod. Sci. Thief-taking in Househ. Words* 13 July 368/1 To each division of the Force is attached two officers, who are denominated 'detectives'.

# The idea of police, for that matter

(Further reading: Carl Klockars 1985)

# Three broad questions

- What distinguishes police from other people or institutions?
- What are police for?
- And why, in modern democratic societies, is most policing done by people in the full-time employ of the state?

# Progressively limiting our imaginations of what a police force can be

1829: Metropolitan Police Act (Eng.)

1844/5: New York

(Bow Street Runners)

1749-1839

# Professional, peace-keeping force

Full-time, paid vocation, on general  
duty, and NOT the general public  
("private citizens")

Situations where you want to grant  
someone the right to use coercive  
force

“Something ought not to be  
happening about which something  
ought to be done NOW!”

Egon Bittner

# No modern vocational police

And why would there be?

Varieties of avocational policing

Obligatory  
Voluntary  
Entrepreneurial

Obligatory  
Voluntary  
Entrepreneurial



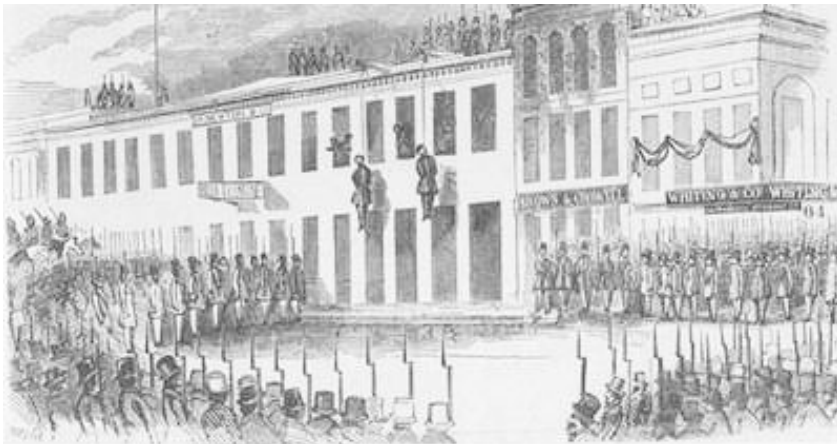




Ed St. Clair. Carl Holton. Capt. Buckey O'Neil. Jas. L. Black.

Obligatory  
Voluntary  
Entrepreneurial

# The American vigilante tradition



## See also

- Neighborhood watches
- Lynch mobs
- Unpaid auxiliary police
- Volunteer patrols

Where's the detecting?

Well...

Obligatory  
Voluntary  
Entrepreneurial

# Thief takers and bounty hunters

Highwayman Act: 1692

# The Bow Street Runners

A more official and organized  
approach to thief taking

# Bow Street Runners

- Founded by Henry Fielding in 1749
- Formally attached to Bow Street magistrates' office
- Paid by the magistrate with funds from central government (expenses, small wages, payments for their “trouble”)
- But private rewards still formed bulk of their pay
- Complaint → arrest
- Soon gave up patrolling; served writs and arrested offenders on the authority of the magistrates
- After Metropolitan Police, remained briefly as parallel/ rival organization, but disbanded ten years later